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ABSTRACT

School restructuring can be frightening for teachers, administrators, and even students as they give up familiar roles and are introduced to new paradigms. Educators affected by restructuring efforts often feel out of place, are reluctant to change, and anxious about the unknown. This paper describes approaches for helping school community members deal with educational change. Individuals must be given the chance to attach personal meaning to the paradigm and the change it implies. The organization should acknowledge that some people may feel loss and act out their grief in a manner similar to Kubler-Ross's stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. School administrators must allow individual relearning to take place as participants reorganize new paradigms and assign personal meaning to them. Successful restructuring entails: (1) the courage to ask people what specifically terrifies them; (2) the support that allows people to share their fears; (3) the patience that allows people to experience feelings and work through conflicts; and (4) the respect to honor individuals' searches for personal meaning. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

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# The Heart of Educational Restructuring: Dealing With Change

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*"But Ashley, what are you afraid of?"*

*"Oh, nameless things. Things which sound very silly when they are put into words. Scarlett, before the war, life was beautiful. I belonged in that life. I was a part of it. And now it is gone and I am out of place in this new life, and I am afraid. Where do I fit in the world anymore? I tell you, I am afraid."*

*Ashley and Scarlett at Tara, after the war.*
*Adapted from Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind.*

One of the most challenging and consuming topics in education is the movement for school-based educational restructuring. Contemporary educational thinkers acknowledge that, in order for us to achieve effective and lasting change, restructuring means that we must make profound changes in the way we approach education itself (Banathy, 1991; Perkins, 1992; Carr and Reigeluth, 1994). The stakes of authentic educational restructuring are high for our children and our communities, and the outcomes of the proposed changes are uncertain. Reactions to school restructuring are understandably passionate.

Dealing with change at this profound level is a notoriously frightening and exhilarating, difficult and easy, often inescapable human endeavor. We believe that it is also the foundational skill critical to those of us involved in the school restructuring movement. It is tempting to skip over discussing the process of change in favor of the more concrete products of change--for example, new curriculum and instructional design strategies, or teacher education reform. However, we believe that discussions about what new activities to undertake must be coupled with discussions about how to manage the human impact of introducing these new activities.

New paradigms for educators have personal as well as occupational implications. As the roles of teachers and administrators are redefined in the name of school restructuring, new purposes need to be forged. As Marris (1974) writes:

> Everyone in the organization has come to understand his or her job--the purposes it satisfied, its give and take, the loyalties and rivalries it implies--as a familiar pattern of relationships, on which they rely to interpret the events of the working day. This definition of their occupational identity represents the accumulated wisdom of how to handle the job, derived from their own experience and the experience of all who have had the job before or share it with them. Change threatens to invalidate this experience, robbing them of the skills they have learned and confusing their purposes, upsetting the subtle rationalizations and compensations by which they reconciled different aspects of their situation (pp. 156-157).

For everyone affected by these new paradigms (teachers, administrators, and even students), there are losses that need to be acknowledged. When things change, those involved have to let go of something--"before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be" (Bridges, p. 19, 1991). According to Bridges (1991) many times "it does little good to talk about how healthy the outcome of the change will be. Instead, you have to deal directly with the losses and endings" (p. 20). Allowing time to deal with the losses and endings means allowing time for a personal search for meaning so that there is a chance to assimilate the new paradigm to one's own experience ( Fullan, 1991; Marris, 1974).

**What Terrifies You Specifically?**

The conversation between Scarlett and Ashley provides a classic example of how frightening change can be and how traumatic the losses can be for those affected. A more modern example comes from *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Future*. As they discuss their exiled status, Kirk asks Bones if he is afraid of the future. Bones then probes and asks: "What terrifies you specifically?" Kirk describes what peace between the Federation and the Klingons means to him: no more neutral zone would mean there's nothing for him and his fleet to protect anymore; the Klingons

would be an ally instead of an enemy--can he adjust to not hating Klingons (Nimoy, 1991)?

In these two examples, both Kirk and Ashley struggle with a personal search for meaning: where do I fit in anymore? Similarly, educators affected by restructuring efforts may wonder where they fit in anymore. They may feel they have gone from knowing where they belong to feeling out of place. These educators need to be given the chance and encouragement to struggle with new ways of thinking, new methods, new concepts. This struggle needs to be a natural and expected part of the change process.

People are reluctant and even afraid to change for many reasons. Even when the change is in a direction that people **want** to move in, people need pressure to change (Fullan, 1991). According to Everett Rogers' (1983) research on the diffusion of innovations, those who are non-adopters when it comes to change comprise only 16% of "Adopter Types". Over half of the "Adopter Types" fall into the Early and Late Majority categories. These are people that need some time to get used to the idea of the change before they're willing to adopt it. Perhaps Kirk in *Star Trek VI* is an example of an Early to Late Majority Adopter: the prospect of universal peace was desirable, yet Kirk had some problems with the new paradigm. After all, he was quite used to and comfortable with hating Klingons! At the very least, Kirk would have to move from the familiar (hating Klingons) to the unfamiliar (seeing Klingons as allies).

And, let us not forget that there is an anxiety that accompanies ventures into the unknown (Marris, 1974). Ashley voices that anxiety when he explains that he is afraid of nameless things, "things which sound very silly when they are put into words."

Losses also accompany change: anytime a choice is made, while there is something gained by the choice made, the options rejected constitute losses (Satir,

Stachowiak, and Taschman, 1975). According to Marris (1974), changes that represent loss, "either actual or prospective, from death or from the discrediting of familiar assumptions" result in a "crisis of discontinuity" (p. 21). While new paradigms in education may be desirable, they also represent losses. The redefining of roles, relationships, and responsibilities for educators could result in a confusion of purpose. Like Ashley, they may wonder where or if they fit in this new world.

**I Am Out of Place**

It does not matter how meaningful a new paradigm is to others. What matters is how meaningful it is to the individual affected. The individual must be given the chance to attach personal meaning to the paradigm and the change it implies (Marris, 1974; Fullan, 1991). Loss is subjective. When a change occurs, for some, it will be uncomfortable but manageable. For others, it may be downright terrifying. Bridges (1991) suggests acknowledging that *loss* is real for everyone in a change by allowing discussions to take place; discussions that focus around who is having to let go of something and what is over for everyone. Signs of grieving may surface. Kübler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief may be acted out: **denial** that the loss/change will take place; **anger** at the realization that this is really going to happen; **bargaining** to get out of the situation or make it go away; **depression** over really sensing what is being lost; and finally, **acceptance** of the change. People may test out whether or not the change has to be accepted and according to Marris (1974), this could be a positive sign, indicating the beginning of coming to terms with the loss. Unfortunately, instead of allowing the time and patience to let those affected argue the change out and adapt it to their own interpretation of their working lives (Marris, 1974), "many of us wander way off into left field by getting into the agreement/disagreement negotiations before we really understand the meaning" (Satir, Stachowiak, & Taschman, p. 157) of what's going on.

Conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change efforts (Fullan, 1991). Competing purposes and interests are at stake (Hargreaves, 1994). It would certainly be unusual for there to be no conflict or disagreement when groups of people are involved in a change. The presence of conflict could indicate that the meaning of relationships are being tested (Marris, 1974). Again, care needs to be taken in how conflict or disagreement is interpreted. When it is misunderstood, "right vs. wrong" confrontations are created when instead, time, patience, and support for working out the conflict are needed.

New paradigms may bring a disorientation of purpose, becoming a profound source of anxiety (Marris, 1974). Redefining your place in the new world created by the new paradigm may be threatening and learning to understand the situation and cope with it is critical to being able to move on (Marris, 1974). The struggle to understand and modify events and processes to make the new paradigm personally meaningful (Fullan 1991) is a learning process. New paradigms mean that educators need to relearn their identity (occupational and perhaps personal as well) and educators need to be given the opportunity to construct that new identity. A structure needs to be created, perhaps similar to what Senge (1990) describes as a learning organization, to allow this relearning to take place. Learning organizations are places where new and expansive patterns of thinking are encouraged, people are continually learning how to learn together, and the capacity to create new identities, new ideas, new paradigms is extended (Senge, 1990).

Because meaning or purpose serves as a point of reference and allows us to make sense out of non-sense (Marris, 1974; Wheatley, 1993), it is important that relearning take place. New paradigms can be non-sense unless the opportunity to reorganize around a new personal meaning is provided. Such opportunities are packaged with respect for differences, patience, and support during the search for personal meaning. Establishing relationships that give voice and form to the search

for meaning is essential (Wheatley, 1993). It is these relationships that will encourage and allow the expression of the nameless things that we fear will sound very silly when put into words.

Change is not a linear process. Elaborate rules and structures designed to guide the change process may not be particularly helpful. Because it is not fully predictable, anxiety around moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar may be heightened. And when a loss is involved, sensitivity to the crisis of discontinuity described by Marris (1974) is especially important. Bridges (1991) suggests that the following may help to minimize the anxiety around a change/loss:

•Give people lots and lots of information about what's going on. Take the chastity belt off and let information roam about (Wheatley, 1993).

•Define what's over and what isn't. Be specific about what is changing; what goes, what stays.

•Mark the endings by creating actions or activities that dramatize them. Let people take a piece of the past with them when possible (a "souvenir" or momento of some sort).

•Treat the past with respect. Honor it for what it did accomplish.

•Show how the change is not a total break with the past but instead, builds upon it.

**Are You Willing to Leave Home?**

"The rules of the world are changing. It is time for the rules of teaching and teachers' work to change with them" (Hargreaves, p. 262). This may be the rallying cry for the school restructuring effort. It also is a cry that may strike fear in the hearts of educators. Like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, it is tempting to long for the familiarity and comfort of home: after all, "there's no place like home!" For school restructuring efforts to be successful, those involved have to be willing to leave home. According to Bridges (1991), "the single biggest reason organizational

changes fail is that no one thought about endings or planned to manage their impact on people" (p. 32). We must understand and accept that those affected by new paradigms may be afraid of the future. And what they fear may be that they do not fit in to the new world. If we understand that people may be afraid of the future, afraid of being out of place, we can then ask them what specifically terrifies them about the future. This key question may serve to embark people on the search for personal meaning.

The following adaptation from *Gone With the Wind* illustrates the type of journey we must be willing to take (and allow others to take) when coming to terms with change, whether that change is imposed upon us or freely chosen.

*Denial*: After a long time, she lay weakly on her face, the earth as soft and comfortable as a feather pillow, and her mind wandered feebly here and there.

*Anger*: She, Scarlett O'Hara, was lying in the midst of ruins, too sick and too weak to move, and no one in the world knew or cared. No one would care if they did know, for everyone had too many troubles of their own to worry about her. And all this was happening to her, Scarlett O'Hara, who had never raised her hand even to pick up her discarded stockings from the floor or to tie the laces of her slippers--Scarlett, whose little headaches and tempers had been coddled and catered to all her life.

*Depression/loss*: As she lay prostrate, too weak to fight off memories and worries, they rushed at her, circled about her like buzzards waiting for a death. The thoughts circled and swooped above her, dived down and drove tearing claws and sharp beaks into her mind. For a timeless time, she lay still, her face in the dirt, the sun beating hotly upon her, remembering things and people who were dead, remembering a way of living that was gone forever--and looking upon the harsh vista of the dark future.

*Bargaining*: When she arose at last and saw again the black ruins of Twelve Oaks, her head was raised high and something that was youth and beauty and potential tenderness had gone out of her face forever.

*Acceptance*: What was past was past. Those who were dead were dead. The lazy luxury of the old days was gone, never to return.

*The conclusion of the search for personal meaning*: And, as Scarlett settled the heavy basket across her arm, she had settled her own mind and her own life. There was no going back and she was going forward.

This example helps to illustrate what we believe must be at the heart of educational restructuring efforts:

The *courage* to ask people what specifically terrifies them, what they are afraid of;

The *support* that allows people to talk about the nameless things that they fear will sound silly when put into words;

The *patience* to allow them to be angry, depressed, or not fully accepting of the situation while working through the conflicts that will arise;

And the *respect* to honor where their individual search for personal meaning takes them.

It is when losses have been acknowledged and the journey for the search for personal meaning has concluded that it is time for the next step:

Come to the edge, she said.
They said, We are AFRAID.
Come to the edge, she said.
They came.
She pushed them.
And they flew.

--Guillaume Apollinair--

Let us be careful to not push people off the edge before they are ready to fly.

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